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STEWART J. BROWN

## ‘Echoes of Midlothian’: Scottish Liberalism and the South African War, 1899–1902

In 1899, at the beginning of the South African War, the supporters of the earl of Rosebery attempted to bring him out of retirement and restore him to the leadership of the Liberal party. Their aim was to reform the Liberal party, instilling it with enthusiasm for imperialism and more efficient government—while dropping ‘outworn policies’, especially Irish home rule. It would be another Midlothian, repeating the campaign that had brought Gladstone back to the Liberal party leadership in 1879–80. The Liberal Imperialist movement and the struggle for the Liberal party leadership during the South African War have been the subjects of considerable scholarly interest.<sup>1</sup> Far less attention, however, has been directed to the Scottish context of their struggle, despite the fact that both major rivals for the party leadership—Rosebery and Campbell-Bannerman—were Scots and both looked upon Scotland as their political base.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, to a large extent the struggle for the Liberal leadership was fought out on Scottish soil. This essay will explore that struggle in Scotland, where disenchantment among Scottish Liberals with the financial and moral costs of imperialism during the war would decide the leadership question, destroying confidence in Liberal Imperialist claims, raising doubts about Scotland’s role in the British Imperial enterprise and preparing the way for a Scottish Liberal revival after 1902 based on the old orthodoxy of peace, retrenchment and reform.

### I

Liberalism was the dominant political creed of Victorian Scotland, and the Liberal party, which emerged as a coherent organisation

<sup>1</sup> Significant studies include H. C. G. Matthew, *The Liberal Imperialists: the Ideas and Policies of a Post-Gladstonian Elite* (Oxford, 1973), esp. 37–124; J. Wilson, *CB: A Life of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman* (London, 1973), 299–406; R. Rhodes James, *Rosebery* (London, 1963), 364–458; G. L. Bernstein, ‘Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman and the Liberal Imperialists’, *Journal of British Studies*, xxii (1983), 104–24; P. D. Jacobson, ‘Rosebery and Liberal Imperialism’, *ibid.*, xiii (1973), 83–107.

<sup>2</sup> The Scottish context of the Liberal contest has received some attention in two studies: Mathew, *Liberal Imperialists*, 37–124 *passim*; and I. G. C. Hutchison, *A Political History of Scotland, 1832–1924* (Edinburgh, 1986), esp. 175–85, 227–40.

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during the later 1860s, established an ascendancy over the Scottish electorate and made Scotland a bastion of British Liberalism.<sup>1</sup> Scottish voters responded warmly to the Liberal emphasis on individual autonomy and self-help, to Liberal doctrines of free trade and limited government, to attacks on aristocratic and clerical privilege, and to the elevation of free speech and human rationality. In 1876–77, in response to the expanded electorate created by the Scottish Reform Act of 1868 and to the emergence of the party caucus system in England, wealthy Scottish whig-liberals had created two regional political organisations in Scotland—one for the East and North of Scotland and one for the West and South of Scotland—which in 1881 merged to form the Scottish Liberal Association. Unlike the English National Liberal Federation formed in 1877, the Scottish Liberal Association was not intended to be a forum for debating policy, but was rather to be limited to providing organisational advice and financial assistance to the constituency Liberal associations. It consisted of a general council, comprised of delegates from each of the affiliated constituency associations, and a co-opted executive council of about twenty members, who represented the men of wealth, status and influence within Scottish Liberalism. The general council convened each year for an annual meeting, usually in January or February, when membership of the executive was approved and the annual report adopted.<sup>2</sup>

During its early years, the Scottish Liberal Association was dominated by wealthy whig-liberal landowners and professionals, and reflected their interests and concerns.<sup>3</sup> While an urban radical, Joseph Chamberlain, had been the major influence behind the formation of the English National Liberal Federation, the dominant figure behind the Scottish Liberal Association, and its president throughout the 1880s and 1890s, was the patrician landowner, the earl of Rosebery. He emerged to national prominence in 1879 when he stage-managed Gladstone's first Midlothian campaign from his Dalmeny estate outside Edinburgh, in what proved for Rosebery a successful bid to defeat the representative of the rival duke of Buccleuch.<sup>4</sup> Rosebery proceeded to develop his own political base in Scotland, leading the successful agitation for a separate Scottish Office,

1 I. MacLeod, 'Scotland and the Liberal party, 1880–1900: Church, Ireland and Empire' (Glasgow University M. Litt. thesis, 1978), 262.

2 J. G. Kellas, 'The Liberal Party in Scotland, 1876–1895', *ante*, xlv (1965), 2–4; Hutchison, *Political History of Scotland*, 145–6.

3 For the 'Whig-Liberal' political ethos, see especially the illuminating discussion in J. P. Parry, *Democracy and Religion: Gladstone and the Liberal Party, 1867–1875* (Cambridge, 1986), 42–67.

4 For an excellent recent study of the first Midlothian campaign, see D. Brooks, 'Gladstone and Midlothian: the Background of the First Campaign', *ante*, lxiv (1985), 42–67.

with a Scottish secretary holding cabinet rank.<sup>1</sup> Despite private reservations about Irish home rule, he remained loyal to Gladstone at the Liberal party crisis of 1885–86. As foreign secretary in the Gladstone governments of 1886 and 1892–94, he developed his expertise and interests in the area of imperial policy. Following Gladstone's retirement in 1894, Rosebery became prime minister and Liberal leader. As prime minister, however, he proved erratic and over-sensitive. Torn by internal dissension, especially the rivalry and personal animus between Rosebery and his chancellor of the exchequer, Sir William Harcourt, the Rosebery government of 1894–95 foundered and the Liberals suffered an overwhelming defeat at the general election of 1895.<sup>2</sup> The following year, at the age of forty-nine, Rosebery resigned as Liberal leader and was replaced by Harcourt.

Rosebery, however, was in the prime of life and he retained a loyal following, especially in Scotland, where many shared his enthusiasm for imperialism. Rosebery was a great orator, with the ability to arouse his audiences to moral fervour for the imperial mission—and in late nineteenth-century Scotland, many groups were deriving the fruits of empire. In Glasgow, the 'second city of the empire', the shipbuilding and heavy engineering industries prospered through imperial trade. Scottish banks were heavily involved in overseas investment, Scottish engineers supervised the construction of railways across India and Africa, and Scottish commercial entrepreneurs, such as Thomas Sutherland, chairman of the P. & O. Steam Navigation Company, or William MacKinnon, chairman of the Imperial British East India Company, amassed fortunes from the empire. The Scottish churches, active in the mission fields, nurtured enthusiasts for the 'civilising' mission of Imperialism, of whom David Livingstone of Blantyre was the most famous. Scotland sent out some of the great aristocratic proconsuls of the Victorian empire, among them the earls of Elgin, Aberdeen, Dalhousie and Minto.<sup>3</sup> There was, in short, an outward-looking Scotland, alive to the economic opportunities of empire, and also perceiving itself as England's imperial partner, part of a mission to bring the gospel, material civilization and British conceptions of justice and liberty to the backward regions of the globe. Following his retirement as Liberal leader, Rosebery maintained a circle of supporters in the neighbourhood of his Dalmeny estate in eastern Scotland. These Roseberyites included

1 H. J. Hanham, 'The Creation of the Scottish Office, 1881–87', *Juridical Review*, n.s., x (1968), 207–12.

2 P. Stansky, *Ambitions and Strategies* (Oxford, 1964), 158–80; D. A. Hamer, *Liberal Politics in the Age of Gladstone and Disraeli* (Oxford, 1972), 185–207.

3 S. and O. Checkland, *Industry and Ethos: Scotland 1832–1914* (London, 1984), 155–64.

the Scottish Liberal MPs, R. B. Haldane, Ronald Munro-Ferguson, and Thomas D. Gibson-Carmichael, the Edinburgh University philosophy lecturer, Dr Charles M. Douglas, and two English MPs with strong Scottish connections, H. H. Asquith and Edward Grey. Members of the traditional whig-liberal governing elite in Scotland—landed gentlemen, legal professionals and academics—these men had little taste for the emerging democracy. They were confident of their capacity to transcend interest politics and class conflicts and, in the words of the historian of the movement, ‘to bring an independent and untrammelled judgement to bear upon the national problems of the day’. As Gibson-Carmichael’s wife later recalled, Rosebery’s circle ‘foregathered and discussed State affairs in good old eighteenth-century style, sitting round the mahogany, under family pictures, with ... [a] choice vintage to provide good cheer and an alternative topic of conversation’.<sup>1</sup> They also controlled the executive of the Scottish Liberal Association. Rosebery retained the presidency of the association, while the two vice-presidents were also supporters. His protege and former private secretary, Munro-Ferguson, was both treasurer of the association and Scottish Liberal whip, and Gibson-Carmichael, MP for the Rosebery-controlled county of Midlothian, was chairman of the general council.<sup>2</sup>

Rosebery and his supporters believed they would find support in Scotland for a new Liberal creed—‘Liberal Imperialism’—embracing not only an enthusiasm for empire, but also proposals for a more efficient, business-like approach to government and an increased role for the state in education, scientific research and social reform.<sup>3</sup> In the west of Scotland, Glasgow was a model progressive municipal corporation, with advanced transport, gas, water and sanitary services that exemplified the ideal of ‘efficiency’—while Glasgow’s close economic ties with Belfast meant that many in the business community had repudiated Irish home rule. Although still largely viewing themselves as Liberals, Glaswegian voters had rejected Gladstonian Liberalism after 1886, and the west of Scotland had become one of the centres of Liberal Unionist strength in Britain.<sup>4</sup> If the party would drop Irish home rule, several Liberal Unionist MPs expressed themselves prepared to return to the Liberal fold.<sup>5</sup> In the north and east of Scotland, the traditional landed and professional elites could be expected to respond to appeals for a sane imperialism

1 *Lord Carmichael of Stirling: A Memoir Prepared by his Wife* (London, n.d.), 90–1.

2 Hutchison, *Political History of Scotland*, 177.

3 For further discussion of the ideas of Liberal Imperialism, see especially G. R. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and Political Thought, 1899–1914* (Oxford, 1971), and Mathew, *Liberal Imperialists*.

4 M. Fry, *Patronage and Principle. A Political History of Modern Scotland* (Aberdeen, 1987), 111–2; MacLeod, ‘Scotland and the Liberal Party’, 112, 126.

5 Hutchison, *Political History of Scotland*, 176.

and more 'efficient' government. The presbyterian dissenting churches—the Free Church and the United Presbyterians—had by 1895 largely dropped their campaign to disestablish the Church of Scotland, and were instead working for presbyterian reunion, to make the churches more efficient in their home and overseas missions.<sup>1</sup> Liberal Imperialists also believed that their attention to social reform would win back working class voters. In October 1896, Munro-Ferguson informed Rosebery that only 'middle class faddists or enthusiasts' stood against his return as Liberal leader, and in August 1897 R. B. Haldane assured Rosebery that he would again be leader in 'about five years'—after the ground had been 'cleared of the rubbish which now covers it'.<sup>2</sup>

In order to reform the Scottish Liberal party, the Liberal Imperialists would need either to convert or silence the party's largely middle-class and artisan radical or Gladstonian wing, which remained committed to the old Liberal orthodoxy of peace, retrenchment and popular reform, and which had no enthusiasm for imperialism or 'efficiency'.<sup>3</sup> Radicals were deeply opposed to privilege, whether of birth or wealth, and proud of Scotland's 'democratic' traditions in education and religion. Most were intensely individualistic, with a distrust of state centralism and collectivism. They resented what they perceived as Scotland's subordinate and peripheral position in British politics, and responded warmly to Gladstone's appeals to moral imperatives and the rights of small nations in international politics. The radical wing in Scottish Liberalism had been strengthened by the expansion of the electorate in 1884, by the defection of the Liberal Unionists in 1885–6, and by the 'crofters' war' in the Highlands. Radicals called for the disestablishment of the Church of Scotland and full religious equality. In response to the Irish movement, Scottish radicals embraced the cause of Scottish home rule and in 1886 formed the Scottish Home Rule Association, calling for 'home-rule-all-round' and a radical restructuring of the British state.<sup>4</sup> Although they rejected collectivism, they supported the efforts of Scottish labour for improved conditions and greater dignity for the working man. In 1888, several radicals, including Dr Gavin B. Clark and R. B. Cunninghame-Graham, joined James Keir Hardie in forming the Scottish Labour Party.

In the later 1880s, the radical wing, under the leadership of the

1 G. I. T. Machin, 'Voluntaryism and Reunion', in *Church, Politics and Society: Scotland 1408–1929*, ed. N. MacDougall (Edinburgh, 1983), 228–33.

2 R. Munro-Ferguson to Rosebery, 19 Oct. 1896, cited in Hutchison, *Political History of Scotland*, 177; National Library of Scotland [NLS], Rosebery MSS, MS 10029, fos 57–60, R. B. Haldane to Rosebery, 24 Aug. 1897.

3 In my discussion of the radical wing of Scottish Liberalism, I am again indebted to Parry, *Democracy and Religion*, 199–257.

4 H. J. Hanham, *Scottish Nationalism* (London, 1969), 91–4.



Gladstonians, A. L. Brown of Galashiels and David McLardy of Glasgow, came to dominate the general council of the Scottish Liberal Association. There was a minor revolution in the association in 1886, when, responding to the Liberal crisis following the secession of the Liberal Unionists, the executive agreed to permit the discussion of party policy in the general council. In the early 1880s, the association had begun holding autumn conferences of the general council in different towns and cities around Scotland, and after 1886 these autumn conferences became popular forums for policy discussions and the adoption of lengthy programmes of reform proposals. In October 1891, for example, the general council passed resolutions calling for Scottish and Irish home rule, disestablishment, women's suffrage, the eight-hour day, payment of MPs, triennial parliaments, the taxation of land values, and the abolition of the house of lords.<sup>1</sup> Theirs was, Scottish radicals believed, more advanced than the celebrated Newcastle Programme adopted by the National Liberal Federation in England that same month. 'The programme passed at Newcastle', David McLardy asserted at the council's annual meeting in February 1892, 'might be good enough for Englishmen, but it was not good enough for Scotsmen—it wanted the democratic ring'.<sup>2</sup> The radical wing was strengthened in 1896, when Harcourt became leader of the Liberal party, cooperating closely with John Morley, MP for Montrose Burghs, who had a strong following in northeast Scotland.

In the 1880s and early 1890s, some Scottish radicals had looked to Rosebery as Gladstone's heir as Liberal leader, a Scottish patriot who had led the fight for the creation of the Scottish Office, an aristocrat with concern for the common man, an orator who could appeal to all classes with emotional addresses on Scotland's history and culture. 'It is because we think you are a Radical like ourselves', the left-wing leader, A. L. Brown, wrote to Rosebery in March 1894, 'ready and willing to lead us along the only safe path now, that we are willing to give you our absolute confidence'.<sup>3</sup> 'I really don't think you realise', Brown assured him in October 1896, 'how very earnestly some of us desire to be led by one who can really speak as a Scotsman to Scotsmen'.<sup>4</sup> Rosebery, however, was determined to curb the radical influence in the Scottish Liberal Association. Although concerned for the improvement of social conditions (as illustrated in his

1 Edinburgh University Library, Special Collection, [EUL], Scottish Liberal Association Minutes [SLA Mins.], Western General Council Conference, Glasgow, 7 Oct. 1891.

2 Kellas, 'Liberal Party in Scotland', 14.

3 NLS, Rosebery MSS, MS 10092, fos. 26–36, A. L. Brown to Rosebery, 4 Mar. 1894.

4 *Ibid.*, MS 10108, fos 144–5, Brown to Rosebery, 8 Oct. 1896.



progressive chairmanship of the London County Council during the early 1890s), he believed that lasting improvement would come through disinterested leadership by an educated elite with freedom to make independent judgments, and not through radical policy programmes.<sup>1</sup> He also believed that social progress in Scotland was inextricably tied to the development of the British empire. Late in 1898, Rosebery created a crisis in the Scottish Liberal Association when he tendered his resignation as president in protest against the 'faddist' policy resolutions being adopted by the general council. Other Liberal Imperialists were prepared to follow him out, which would have resulted in the disruption of the Association and another major split in Scottish Liberalism. The radicals now backed down, allowing the Liberal Imperialists to gain full control of the executive. In December, the executive promised Rosebery that if he would withdraw his resignation, it would curb policy discussions in the general council—both by ceasing to introduce executive-sponsored policy resolutions at council meetings and by limiting the introduction of policy resolutions from constituency associations. Rosebery accordingly withdrew his resignation. 'We are pretty right here in Scotland', observed Munro-Ferguson in January 1899, 'Our fight in the Executive is fought out'.<sup>2</sup> The usual autumn conference of the general council was not even scheduled for 1899.

In late 1898, in the aftermath of the Fashoda crisis, a concerted Liberal Imperialist attack on Harcourt resulted in his resignation as Liberal leader. Harcourt was replaced as leader by a Scot, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, who had been a loyal secretary of state for war in Rosebery's government and was acceptable to the Liberal Imperialists, who believed he would prove sound on the empire.<sup>3</sup> MP for Stirling Burghs, Campbell-Bannerman maintained a Scottish country home, Belmont Castle, and had his own circle of Scottish political supporters, including the Gladstonians, Thomas Shaw, W. Lang Todd, and John Sinclair.<sup>4</sup> A plodding speaker, he was generally regarded as a man of limited abilities and a mere stop-gap leader. The Liberal Imperialists soon became impatient with his uninspiring leadership in the commons, but Rosebery endeavoured to silence their criticism. As he cautioned Munro-Ferguson in March 1899,

<sup>1</sup> Mathew, *Liberal Imperialists*, 226–7.

<sup>2</sup> EUL, SLA Mins., Executive Council, 20 Oct., 8 Nov., 1898, 13 Jan. 1899; British Library [BL], Campbell-Bannerman MSS, Add. MS 41222, fos 278–83, 284–6, 291–4, R. Munro-Ferguson to H. Campbell-Bannerman, 19 Nov., 16 Dec. 1898, 23 Jan. 1899; NLS, Rosebery MSS, MS 10111, fos 113–4, 118–20, 139–40, T. D. Gibson-Carmichael to Rosebery, 15 Oct. 1898, Rosebery to Gibson-Carmichael, 19 Oct. 1898, Gibson-Carmichael to Rosebery, 21 Nov. 1898.

<sup>3</sup> Mathew, *Liberal Imperialists*, 31–2.

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, *CB*, 147–57.

‘remember that he is thoroughly straight, a gentleman, a friend of yours, a Scot, and do not be hasty to despair of him’.<sup>1</sup>

## II

News of war between Britain and the Boer republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State reached Scotland in mid-October 1899. There was considerable public excitement as Scotland’s historic regiments were called up. In Glasgow and the industrial west, the war brought lucrative military contracts, jobs and higher wages. The Scottish presbyterian churches, on the whole, supported the war, with the respected South African missionary and moderator of the Free Church general assembly of 1899, James Stewart of Lovedale, condemning the Boers not only for oppressing white uitlanders, but also for obstructing the Christian mission to black South Africans.<sup>2</sup> The fact that the Boers had begun the war by invading British territory settled the issue for many who had previously opposed Chamberlain’s foreign policy. Close economic ties with South Africa, especially in the mining industry, meant that some Scots had personal reasons for disliking the Boers. ‘I did not know until I had spoken to my constituents’, Haldane observed of his East Lothian seat in mid-October, ‘... what a strong deep feeling there was—not jingoism but the sense of wrong done them in the person of some brother or nephew or son who had been ill-used in the Transvaal’.<sup>3</sup> According to J. W. Crombie, Liberal MP for Kincardine, ‘the general opinion of Liberals is this: “War is a bad business but the Boers have brought it on themselves and it can’t be helped”’.<sup>4</sup>

While Scottish opinion seemed to rally behind the British forces, however, a number of Gladstonians and radicals believed the war to be the inevitable result of aggressive imperialist policies directed against the small republics. Among the Scottish Liberal MPs, the leading ‘pro-Boer’ was John Morley, who both challenged the morality of the war and warned of the high costs of imperialism—costs which would force an increase in taxation and divert resources from needed social reforms at home.<sup>5</sup> Another prominent Scottish ‘pro-

1 Rhodes James, *Rosebery*, 420.

2 *Scotsman*, 6 Oct. 1899; *Glasgow Herald*, 23 Jan. 1900.

3 R. B. Haldane to J. A. Spender, 14 Oct. 1899, cited in D. C. Elliot, ‘The Liberal Party in Scotland from the Midlothian Election to the First World War’ (Harvard University Ph.D. thesis, 1950), 75.

4 J. A. Crombie to J. Bryce, 7 Oct. 1899, cited in MacLeod, ‘Scotland and the Liberal Party’, 234.

5 For Morley’s views on the war, see D. A. Hamer, *John Morley. Liberal Intellectual in Politics* (Oxford, 1968), 311–28.

Boer' was Dr. G. B. Clark, the 'crofters' MP' for Caithness-shire, a founding member of the Scottish Labour Party and a former president of the Scottish Home Rule Association—who had also served for a time as a consul-general for the Boer republics in London.<sup>1</sup> On 19 October 1899, no fewer than 17 of the 41 Liberal MPs for Scotland voted for Philip Stanhope's amendment in the commons 'disapproving of the conduct of the negotiations which had involved us in hostilities with the South African Republics'.<sup>2</sup>

Rosebery and the Liberal Imperialists were largely uninformed on the situation in South Africa, while Rosebery himself had little confidence in either Chamberlain or Arthur Milner, the chief architects of British imperial policy in the region.<sup>3</sup> However, once the war had begun the Liberal Imperialists defended it as a just and necessary struggle for the rights of British subjects in the Transvaal and the preservation of the British empire. Privately, they also viewed the war as an opportunity for rallying the nation behind the imperial mission and restoring a 'sane' Liberalism at home. With their pro-Boer sentiments, the Gladstonian radicals appeared to be cutting themselves off from popular opinion. The war, then, might provide the occasion for purging the Liberal party of the radical element, and reconstructing it along Liberal Imperialist lines. The Liberal party, Rosebery assured Edward Grey on 21 October 1899, 'is nearing its final cataclysm. The rump will break with the Imperialist section and ally itself with the Irishry. All this in the long run must tend to the good'.<sup>4</sup> In October, Rosebery became an 'independent Liberal' candidate for the rectorship of Glasgow University, in the pro-imperialist industrial west, and Haldane and Grey travelled to Glasgow to campaign for him.<sup>5</sup> When Rosebery was elected, defeating the Liberal Unionist candidate and celebrated physicist, Lord Kelvin, his supporters grew convinced that Scottish Liberalism was rallying to their standard. Although there was 'a good large section against us', Munro-Ferguson reported to Rosebery on 30 October, 'I am sure we have the majority of the party'. Rosebery now seemed prepared to come out of retirement. 'The position of the Liberal party', he wrote Haldane on 4 November, 'is very difficult just now. . . . But I think the Liberal Imperialists should unfurl their flag.

1 Other leading Scottish pro-Boer MPs included Thomas Shaw (Hawick Burghs), D. V. Pirie (Aberdeen North), James Bryce (Aberdeen South) and R. T. Reid (Dumfries Burghs).

2 *Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons*, 4th ser., lxxvii (1899), cols. 367–72.

3 Mathew, *Liberal Imperialists*, 172–3.

4 Rhodes James, *Rosebery*, 412–3.

5 NLS, Rosebery MSS, MS 10131, fo 208, Rosebery to E. Grey, 21 Oct. 1899; MS 10028, fos 85–6, Grey to Rosebery, 22 Oct. 1899; *Scotsman*, 26 Oct. 1899.

The name alone will purge the Liberal party of the ranker elements which have done it so much harm'.<sup>1</sup>

Campbell-Bannerman, meanwhile, was seeking to conciliate both wings of the party, publicly criticising the Unionist government's South African policy as aggressive and expansionist, but acknowledging that the war would have to be seen through to victory.<sup>2</sup> The Liberal Imperialists were unhappy with the party leader's lack of zeal for the war, but avoided open confrontation. Early in November, the Liberal Imperialist Scottish whip, Munro-Ferguson, informed Campbell-Bannerman that as the party in Scotland was 'much divided', he was advising Liberal candidates 'not to rush their meetings for awhile'. It was fortunate, he added, that the 'propaganda work' of Scottish Liberal Association had been stopped.<sup>3</sup> Although Campbell-Bannerman admitted there was 'a good deal of war fever' in Scotland, he refused to countenance any muzzling of the party.<sup>4</sup> Rather, he decided to carry his own standard into Scotland, agreeing to address a public meeting in Aberdeen on 19 December 1899 to demonstrate support for the city's two pro-Boer Liberal MPs, D. V. Pirie and James Bryce. Further, he asked the executive of the Scottish Liberal Association to call an autumn conference of the general council for the day after his address. The executive was thrown into confusion by this request. No autumn general council conference had been planned that year; indeed, after the agreement of 1898 the Liberal Imperialists controlling the executive believed they had finished with the general council conferences. Despite their misgivings the executive agreed not to refuse Campbell-Bannerman's request—but Rosebery, Munro-Ferguson, Grey and Haldane declined to attend the meeting.<sup>5</sup>

On 19 December 1899, Campbell-Bannerman addressed the public meeting in Aberdeen—before an audience stunned by the British reverses of the 'Black Week' of 10–17 December, including the slaughter of the Highland Brigade and the death of the popular General 'Andy' Wauchope at Magersfontein.<sup>6</sup> While lauding the qualities of the British soldiers, Campbell-Bannerman openly condemned the imperialist policies that he argued had led to an

1 NLS, Rosebery MSS, MS 10019, fos 125–6, R. Munro-Ferguson to Rosebery, 30 Oct. 1899; NLS, Haldane MSS, MS 5904, fos 208–9, Rosebery to R. B. Haldane, 4 Nov. 1899.

2 Wilson, *CB*, 315–6.

3 BL, Campbell-Bannerman MSS, Add. MS 41222, fos 307–10, R. Munro-Ferguson to H. Campbell-Bannerman, 8 Nov. 1899.

4 Campbell-Bannerman to H. Gladstone, 7 Dec. 1899, cited in Wilson, *CB*, 320.

5 NLS, Rosebery MSS, MS 10112, fos 226–7, T. D. Gibson-Carmichael to Rosebery, 25 Nov. 1899; *Scotsman*, 20 Dec. 1899.

6 General Wauchope had run against W. E. Gladstone for Midlothian in the general election of 1895.

unnecessary war. 'The Liberal party', he proclaimed, 'accepts no responsibility for this war—and has never acquiesced in the policy and proceedings which had led to it'.<sup>1</sup> At the general council conference the next day, the executive appeared to register formal disapproval of Campbell-Bannerman when it refused to move the customary executive-sponsored resolution of confidence in the party leader. This rebuff brought an angry response from the conference floor. The radicals, A. L. Brown, David McLardy and G. B. Waddell, publicly deplored the executive's slighting of the party leader, and suggested that the executive was acting on Rosebery's instructions. The general council then broke with the executive and adopted an 'unofficial' resolution of its 'continued and unabated confidence' in Campbell-Bannerman's leadership. The council also disavowed the arrangement over policy resolutions made the previous year between the executive and Rosebery, and it proceeded to endorse a full programme of policy resolutions, including home-rule-all-round, disestablishment, women's suffrage, taxation of land values, and the abolition of the house of lords.<sup>2</sup> 'It was', the Unionist *Scotsman* reported on 21 December, 'neither a happy nor a harmonious party that assembled at Aberdeen': 'signs of disagreement' were 'obtrusive'.<sup>3</sup> None the less, Campbell-Bannerman believed that 'the whole thing at the meeting went off well'.<sup>4</sup> He had reason to feel encouraged. He had revived the general council of the Scottish Liberal Association as a forum for policy discussion, while the Liberal press in Scotland was broadly supportive of the line he had taken in his speech.<sup>5</sup> His position, moreover, was acceptable to the anti-war Liberals and gained him the support of the Harcourt-Morley group in Scotland—eliminating for the time being any threat from the left wing of the party while he consolidated his hold on the centre.

For Rosebery, the Aberdeen conference had been humiliating. He was hurt and angered by the accusation that he had instructed the executive to slight the party leader—an accusation that the general council had seemed to endorse. On 23 December, he felt obliged to write to Campbell-Bannerman to expose the 'perversion of the facts' expressed by the radicals in the council. He had, he admitted, opposed the idea of an executive-sponsored resolution of confidence in the leader, but only because he saw it as a precedent, 'the thin end of the wedge for reverting to the former practice [of policy

1 *Scotsman*, 20 Dec. 1899.

2 EUL, SLA Mins., General Council, 20 Dec. 1899; *North British Daily Mail*, 21 Dec. 1899.

3 *Scotsman*, 21 Dec. 1899.

4 NLS, Haldane MSS, MS 5904, fos. 216–7, H. Campbell-Bannerman to Haldane, 21 Dec. 1899.

5 See, for example, *Dundee Advertiser*, *North British Daily Mail*, both 20 Dec. 1899.

resolutions]’.<sup>1</sup> This explanation could have done little to placate Campbell-Bannerman, who now suspected a desire for ‘open revolt’ among the Liberal Imperialists.<sup>2</sup> On Haldane’s recommendation, Rosebery now decided to cut his ties to the Scottish Liberal Association (of which he was one of the founders) and on 26 January 1900, a month after the Aberdeen meeting, he resigned as president of the association, explaining that he was now a ‘non-party politician’.<sup>3</sup> This time there was no effort to convince him to remain, and at the annual meeting of the association on 27 February, Campbell-Bannerman was elected president. Campbell-Bannerman’s main concern remained to preserve party unity. He made no move to remove the other Liberal Imperialists from the executive, even though he suspected they were remaining only in order to ‘pull the strings’ for Rosebery.<sup>4</sup> At the February meeting, moderates convinced A. L. Brown to withdraw an anti-war motion that might have forced the succession of the remaining Liberal Imperialists from the association. ‘The responsible feeling’, an observer reported to Rosebery on 29 February, ‘was towards avoiding a split’.<sup>5</sup>

In breaking their ties with the Scottish Liberal Association, the Roseberyites had reason to believe that they were doing no harm to their position among rank and file Scottish Liberals. For while the general council of the association was largely critical of the war, outside the association the Scottish people as a whole appeared committed to imperial victory in South Africa. ‘Lord Rosebery’s outspoken patriotism’, a Scottish correspondent reported in *The Times* on 30 December 1899, ‘has lost him none of his popularity in Scotland. As a matter of fact the tide of feeling in this country runs very strongly in favour of the war’. ‘I hear on all sides’, Haldane assured Rosebery on 29 December, ‘that there are, north of the Tweed, all the indications of a growing body of Liberalism which the official organisations wholly fail to represent. It is the old story of the difference between religion and dogma’.<sup>6</sup> The Scottish Liberal Association might continue to represent the old Gladstonian ‘dogmas’ of peace, retrenchment and reform. But for Liberal Imperialists,

1 BL, Campbell-Bannerman MSS, Add. MS 41226, fo 250, Rosebery to Campbell-Bannerman, 23 Dec. 1899; NLS, Rosebery MSS, MS 10131, fos 216–7, Rosebery to T. D. Gibson-Carmichael, 25 Dec. 1899.

2 Wilson, *CB*, 318–20.

3 EUL, SLA Mins., Executive Council, 26 Jan. 1900; Mathew, *Liberal Imperialists*, 47.

4 BL, Viscount Gladstone MSS, Add. MS 45987, fo 78, Campbell-Bannerman to H. Gladstone, 21 Jan. 1900.

5 NLS, Rosebery MSS, MS 10113, fos 89–92, J. S. Haldane (R. B. Haldane’s brother) to Rosebery, 29 Feb. 1900.

6 *The Times*, 30 Dec. 1899; NLS, Rosebery MSS, MS 10029, fos 95–6, R. B. Haldane to Rosebery, 29 Feb. 1900.



the 'religion' of Liberalism was capable of development, and they believed Scottish Liberals were embracing the imperialist mission.

### III

The Liberal divisions in Scotland over the war were further defined in the spring of 1900, when a series of anti-war meetings were violently broken up by jingo mobs in some of Britain's worst war-related rioting. The meetings were connected with the visit of the South African anti-war activist, S. C. Cronwright-Schreiner, whose speaking tour was sponsored jointly by the Stop-the-War Committee and the Independent Labour Party [I.L.P.]. The tour began on 6 March with a public meeting in Glasgow. Along with Cronwright-Schreiner, speakers included the Scottish Labour leader, James Keir Hardie, and the Liberal pro-Boer MPs, David Lloyd George and Henry J. Wilson, while local representatives of the Liberal party, the I.L.P. and the Irish National League appeared on the platform. Order was maintained inside the meeting hall by I.L.P. stewards. Outside, however, a large jingo crowd, including many Glasgow University students, paraded through the streets and ransacked the offices of the pro-Boer I.L.P. *Labour Leader*.<sup>1</sup> Keir Hardie was convinced that the attack had been organised.<sup>2</sup>

The following night in Edinburgh, a jingo mob led by Edinburgh University students was well prepared to disrupt the anti-war meeting. The mob prevented Cronwright-Schreiner from entering the building, while inside the hall, young jingoes drowned out Keir Hardie's attempts to open the meeting, then stormed the platform armed with clubs. The elderly Theodore Napier, a well-known Scottish home ruler and chairman of the Edinburgh Stop-the-War Committee, was singled out and beaten up. Rioting spread to the streets and continued long into the night. The lack of protection for the meeting suggested that the police colluded with the imperialist mob.<sup>3</sup> More violence occurred the next night at Dundee, where university students led a mob which broke up the Cronwright-Schreiner meeting in the Gilfillan Memorial Church, rioted through the streets, then returned to damage the minister's manse.<sup>4</sup> After the Dundee riot, the rest of the tour was cancelled and Cronwright-Schreiner left

<sup>1</sup> S. C. Cronwright-Schreiner, *The Land of Free Speech: Record of a Campaign on Behalf of Peace in England and Scotland in 1900* (London, 1906), 63–76; *Glasgow Herald*, 7 Mar. 1900.

<sup>2</sup> *Edinburgh Evening News*, 9 Mar. 1900.

<sup>3</sup> Cronwright-Schreiner, *Land of Free Speech*, 77–119; *Scotsman*, 8 Mar., 1900.

<sup>4</sup> Cronwright-Schreiner, *Land of Free Speech*, 120–33; W. M. Walker, *Juteopolis* (Edinburgh, 1979), 277–8; *Glasgow Herald*, 9 Mar. 1900. For the role of the students, see R. Price, *An Imperial War and the British Working Class* (London, 1972), 150–2.



Scotland. Leading Scottish Unionist newspapers excused and even encouraged the attacks. The *Glasgow Herald* characterised the peace meetings as 'the issue of a diseased brain', while the *Scotsman* expressed its 'contempt' for opponents of the war and hoped that the violence by the 'high-spirited young people' would drive the pro-Boers back into 'holes and corners and behind closed doors'.<sup>1</sup>

Others in Scotland, however, were disturbed by a patriotism that refused the right of free speech to dissenting minorities. For the Liberal *Dundee Advertiser*, which supported the war, the 'demonstrations of intolerance' were both shameful in themselves and serious threats to basic liberal values. 'There is', it observed, 'no such thing as free speech at this moment'. The Liberal, pro-Boer *Edinburgh Evening News* referred to 'the fierce epidemic of Yahooism' and 'disgraceful conduct of the mob'—while it also condemned the 'Jingo press of Edinburgh' with 'its veiled approval of conduct of which a band of lunatics would be ashamed'. On 13 March, the Edinburgh Trades Council held a special meeting to condemn the break-up of the anti-war meeting, while protests at the inaction of the police were raised in the Edinburgh city council. Few Scottish Liberals were jingos, and the jingo attacks seemed to be raising doubts about imperial policy among Scottish Liberals who had supported the war as just and necessary. By mid April even the Liberal Imperialist Munro-Ferguson, as Scottish Liberal whip, was denouncing attacks on anti-war meetings.<sup>2</sup>

By the late spring of 1900, the arrival of large numbers of imperial troops had turned the tide after the humiliating early set-backs and the war seemed to be coming to a victorious conclusion. On 18 May, following the relief of Mafeking, Scottish towns and cities joined in the raucous victory celebrations, which continued until the British occupation of the Transvaal capital of Pretoria in early June. For the Liberal Imperialists, the carnival mood was a further demonstration of national commitment to the empire. 'We are all Imperialists now', Rosebery assured the fifth annual meeting of the Edinburgh Unity of the Empire Association in April 1900.<sup>3</sup> Surely the time had come for Scottish Liberalism to renounce the Gladstonian reserve toward the empire. 'The old Liberalism', the Unionist *Glasgow Herald* asserted on 12 April, 'is completely discredited; it has been tested by the touchstone of war and found wanting. It is now possible that a new and more honest Liberal party will yet spring from the fire in which is consumed the cant of the old'. The present 'remarkable moment', Rosebery observed in a letter published in the *Glasgow*

1 *Glasgow Herald*, 7, 14 Mar. 1900; *Scotsman*, 8 Mar. 1900.

2 *Dundee Advertiser*, 13 Apr. 1900.

3 *Glasgow Herald*, 5 Apr. 1900.

*Herald* on 2 June, 'finds faction annihilated by a war in which the great mass of the nation desires to stand shoulder to shoulder. For war, with all its curses, may ultimately bring a blessing'.<sup>1</sup>

Early in June, Campbell-Bannerman sought to reassert his leadership in the Scottish party with a public address sponsored by the Glasgow Liberal Council. The Liberal party, he claimed, had remained largely quiet while the war was being fought, so as not to jeopardize the British forces in the field. But now, with the war apparently won, it was time for the opposition to rouse itself. He proceeded to denounce the imperialist policies that had led to the war, and to call for a generous peace settlement that would start with the annexation of the Boer states but also include the eventual granting of self-governing dominion status.<sup>2</sup> Amid the national celebrations of victory, Campbell-Bannerman's address, delivered to a partially filled hall, was not a success, and his Liberal leadership seemed in question.<sup>3</sup> Rosebery, meanwhile, was being pressed by the Scottish Liberal right to reclaim the party leadership. 'The call is first to Lord Rosebery', asserted the Glasgow *North British Daily Mail* on 8 June, 'and the party waits for him'.<sup>4</sup> However, with a general election expected in the autumn, he decided to wait. The party, he confided to a Scottish supporter, seemed to recognise that it was on 'the brink of a catastrophe' and sought a new leader before the election. But he had no desire to bear upon himself the blame for another electoral defeat, to become a 'scape goat, who shall bear the sins of the people, the burden of past blunders'. He had bitter memories of insomnia, ill-health and feelings of betrayal from his months as Liberal leader. 'Politics may possibly come to me', he wrote, 'but I shall not go to them'. He would, in short, wait until after the election for a clear call from the Liberal party. Thus, while a dispirited Liberal party waited for the election, remarked the *Glasgow Herald* on 13 June, Rosebery '[like Achilles] dreams lazily in his tent'.<sup>5</sup>

In the autumn of 1900, the Unionist government called a general election. The Scottish Liberal party entered the election divided, defensive and largely leaderless. The election resulted in another Liberal defeat. The number of Liberal seats in Scotland had already been greatly reduced at the election of 1895. Now, with the general election of 1900, the Liberals lost their majority of Scottish parliamentary seats for the first time since the Reform Act of 1832. At the dissolution, the Liberal party held 41 Scottish seats, and the

1 *Ibid.*, 12 Apr., 2 June 1900.

2 *Dundee Advertiser*, 8 June 1900.

3 *Glasgow Herald*, 8 June 1900; Fry, *Patronage and Principle*, 117.

4 *North British Daily Mail*, 8 June 1900.

5 NLS, Rosebery MSS, MS 10131 (letterbook), fo 236, Rosebery to T. Wemyss Reid, 1 Jul. 1900 ('Confidential'); *Glasgow Herald*, 13 June 1900.

Unionists and Liberal Unionists 31. After the election of 1900, the Liberals lost 7 Scottish seats and were outnumbered by the Unionists 38 seats to 34. The greatest losses were suffered by the anti-war Liberals. Before the election, 16 Scottish MPs can be categorised as pro-Boer, on the basis of their parliamentary voting and public declarations.<sup>1</sup> Of the 16, 2 withdrew as candidates before the election and 5 suffered defeat at the polls.<sup>2</sup> The remaining 9 were re-elected (though 6 of them with diminished majorities) and one new pro-Boer Liberal, J. D. Hope, was elected for the miners' constituency of West Fife. This gave the Liberal pro-Boers only 10 Scottish seats. The Liberal Imperialist section, on the other hand, fared better. Of their 12 Scottish MPs at the dissolution, one, Gibson-Carmichael, MP for Midlothian, withdrew before the election because of ill-health, but the other 11 were all re-elected.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the Liberal Imperialist, R. L. Harmsworth, defeated the Liberal pro-Boer MP, G. B. Clark, in Caithness. Three or four new Liberal Imperialist candidates were defeated, and the Liberal Imperialists again held 12 seats after the election. The over-all electoral swing against the Liberals in Scotland was less than 2% and the Liberals gained 50.2% of the popular vote. The swing against the Liberals, however, would have been more pronounced without the votes for the Liberal Imperialist candidates.<sup>4</sup>

The fact that in the United Kingdom as a whole the Unionists had gained only 4 seats in 1900 made their gain of 7 seats in Scotland, the former bastion of Liberalism, all the more dramatic. The result in the industrial west of Scotland were especially alarming for the Liberals. In Glasgow, the Liberals lost their last 2 seats, giving all 7 seats to the Unionists, while of a total of 29 county and burgh

<sup>1</sup> The 16 were: J. Bryce (Aberdeen South), T. R. Buchanan (East Aberdeenshire), G. B. Clark (Caithness-shire), J. Dalziel (Kirkcaldy Burghs), A. Dewar (Edinburgh South), G. McCrae (Edinburgh East), W. McEwan (Edinburgh Central), J. MacLeod (Sutherland-shire), J. Morley (Montrose Burghs), D. V. Pirie (Aberdeen North), R. Reid (Dumfries Burghs), T. Shaw (Hawick Burghs), J. Sinclair (Forfarshire), A. R. Suttar (Dumfries-shire), W. Wedderburn (Banffshire), J. G. Weir (Ross & Cromarty). See *The Times*, 31 Jul. 1900; J. Auld, 'The Liberal Pro-Boers', *Journal of British Studies*, xiv (1975), 100-1; Price, *An Imperial War*, 250-1.

<sup>2</sup> Withdrew: McEwan, Wedderburn; defeated: Buchanan, Clark, Dewar, MacLeod, Suttar.

<sup>3</sup> The 12 Liberal Imperialists at the dissolution were: A. Asher (Elgin Burghs), H. H. Asquith (East Fifeshire), T. D. Gibson-Carmichael (Midlothian), J. W. Crombie (Kincardineshire), C. M. Douglas (North-West Lanarkshire), R. C. Munro-Ferguson (Leith), H. J. Tennant (Berwickshire), A. Ure (Linlithgowshire), R. Wallace (Perth), E. Wason (Clackmannan & Kinross), W. Dunn (Paisley), R. B. Haldane (Haddingtonshire). See *The Times*, 31 Jul. 1900, Mathew, *Liberal Imperialists*, 295-301.

<sup>4</sup> *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1885-1918*, ed. F.W.S. Craig (London, 1974), 576; T. Boyle, 'The Liberal Imperialists', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, lii (1979), 56.

constituencies in the west of Scotland, the Liberals won only 6.<sup>1</sup> 'For the first time', trumpeted the Unionist *Scotsman* on 17 October, 'Scotland stands forth as a Kingdom in which Unionism is the dominant creed, and Radicalism has to take a back seat in that part of the realm which hitherto had been its most stubborn stronghold'.<sup>2</sup>

For Rosebery's Scottish supporters, the moment had arrived for his return to the Liberal leadership. Scottish Liberal voters, it seemed, had expressed their weariness with outworn dogmas, and their support for the war and imperialism; they appeared ready for a new leader and a new beginning with a 'clean slate'. Campbell-Bannerman had done all he could to get the party through the general election, but it was time now to free him from the burden of being a stop-gap leader. Rosebery, asserted the *North British Daily Mail* on 18 October, personified the 'newer and broader spirit of Liberalism ... the Liberalism of the future'.<sup>3</sup> For some Liberal Imperialists, Scotland was the key to Liberal reform throughout the United Kingdom. 'Liberalism', Alfred Harmsworth's Liberal Imperialist *Daily News* of Glasgow asserted on 14 October 1900, 'will never regain its old position in the United Kingdom unless and until it is able to establish something like the old sympathy with Scottish opinion'.<sup>4</sup> Now was the time for a second Midlothian, to arouse the faithful in Scotland with the moral obligations of Britain's world leadership, to awaken them to the vital need for 'efficiency', and to bring Rosebery out of retirement and into the Liberal leadership.

#### IV

In explaining the Liberal defeat in Scotland to Campbell-Bannerman, the Scottish Liberal whip, Munro-Ferguson, endeavoured to play down the party divisions. Some of the candidates, Munro-Ferguson suggested, 'were very raw'. In the west of Scotland, the Scoto-Irish Catholic vote had gone Unionist because of their promises to establish a Catholic university for Ireland, while industrial employers, profiting from military contracts, had 'put on the screw everywhere' to pressure workers into voting Unionist. In the east, 'the Tories somehow or other had a rally after the dissolution'.<sup>5</sup> For Campbell-Bannerman, however, a major cause was party division.

1 'The General Election', *Edinburgh Review*, cxcii (Oct. 1900), 539; H. Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections, 1885-1910* (London, 1967), 400-10.

2 *Scotsman*, 17 Oct. 1900.

3 *North British Daily Mail*, 18 Oct. 1900.

4 *Daily News* (Glasgow), 14 Oct. 1900.

5 BL, Campbell-Bannerman MSS, Add. MS 41222, fos 330-3, Munro-Ferguson to Campbell-Bannerman, 24 Oct. 1900.

'The wretched result in Scotland', he confided to Herbert Gladstone, the Liberal chief whip, on 22 October, resulted largely from 'our own factions, which have taken some of the heart out of us'. 'We must now', he added, 'begin to set our house in order'.<sup>1</sup>

One of Campbell-Bannerman's first acts after the election was to accept Munro-Ferguson's resignation as Scottish Liberal whip. Munro-Ferguson had been accused during the election of distributing party campaign funds 'solely to "Imperialists"' and although he denied the allegation, his loyalties to Rosebery did make it appear he was playing a double game.<sup>2</sup> Lord Tweedmouth, the former Liberal chief whip, was convinced that Munro-Ferguson had not 'seen the elections through energetically and squarely', while shortly after his resignation, in a speech to his constituents at Leith on 18 November, Munro-Ferguson confessed to having long opposed Campbell-Bannerman's policies.<sup>3</sup> Campbell-Bannerman replaced Munro-Ferguson (Rosebery's former private secretary) with his own former private secretary, Captain John Sinclair, MP for Forfarshire. Sinclair was a pro-Boer, a moderate social reformer, and an advocate of Irish home rule. He was especially 'well known and popular' in the west of Scotland, which had gone so solidly Unionist at the election.<sup>4</sup> The major question was whether the genial Sinclair would be able to 'stiffen his back and insist on having his own way' against the Liberal Imperialists.<sup>5</sup>

On 15 November, in a speech in Dundee, Campbell-Bannerman gave an example of 'stiffened back' as he responded to the calls for Rosebery's return. Following a spirited defence of the 'dogmas' of Liberalism—the 'Manchester principles' of peace, retrenchment and free trade—he turned to the Liberal Imperialists, whom, with perhaps an intentional slip of the tongue, he called 'Liberal Unionists'. They would, he declared, have to decide whether they remained in communion with the four-fifths of the party who stayed loyal to the old Liberal faith, or whether they would secede. As to the rumours that Rosebery would soon come out of retirement, Campbell-Bannerman expressed the hope that if Rosebery did return it would be to support the whole party and not 'to put himself at the head of a section'.<sup>6</sup> The Dundee speech was an unexpected show of grit,

1 J. A. Spender, *The Life of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman* (London, 1923), i, 297–8.

2 BL, Campbell-Bannerman MSS, Add. MS 41222, fos 326–7, Munro-Ferguson to Campbell-Bannerman, 12 Sep. 1900.

3 *Ibid.*, Add. MS 41231, fos 67–70, Tweedmouth to Campbell-Bannerman, 7 Nov., 1900; *Scotsman*, 19 Nov. 1900.

4 Lady Pentland, *John Sinclair, Lord Pentland: A Memoir* (London, 1928), 20–59; Spender, *Campbell-Bannerman*, i, 299–300.

5 BL, Campbell-Bannerman MSS, Add. MS 41231, fos 67–70, Tweedmouth to Campbell-Bannerman, 7 Nov. 1900.

6 *Scotsman*, 16 Nov. 1900; Spender, *Campbell-Bannerman*, i, 301–5.

demonstrating that Campbell-Bannerman had no intention of relinquishing the party leadership. Leading Liberal Imperialists protested that Campbell-Bannerman was forcing a split.<sup>1</sup>

The following day, Rosebery delivered his rectorial address at Glasgow University, using the opportunity to present a glittering exposition of the imperialist mission and the creed of 'national efficiency'. The empire, he maintained, 'is to us a matter of influence, of peace, of civilisation, above all, a question of faith'. Although the British were by nature 'a conquering and imperial race', there was no room for complacency concerning the preservation of the empire and Britain's great power status. Britain now faced imperial competitors, and would need to modernize and to mobilise all its human resources. Individual self-interest should be subordinated to the preservation and expansion the empire. In education, there must be more attention to science, technical training, business studies and modern languages. There must be social reform, because 'in the rookeries and slums' of Britain's cities 'an imperial race cannot be reared'. Government must be made more efficient and 'business-like'. Such reforms would have practical benefits for the nation. But in the final analysis, the empire was not to be maintained for selfish purposes. The British were a covenanted people, under 'the supreme direction of the Almighty', and in the empire, even 'the most cynical must see the finger of the Divine'.<sup>2</sup> Rosebery's address aroused considerable popular enthusiasm, especially in imperialist and commercial Glasgow.<sup>3</sup> 'He has a great gift of speech', A. L. Brown informed Campbell-Bannerman on 21 November, 'he can "cast his glamour" over men. I was in Glasgow yesterday where people are under the influence of his Rectorial address and the so-called Liberal friends I met were all roaring for Rosebery to put himself at our head'.<sup>4</sup> Outside Glasgow, however, Liberal opinion was less enthusiastic. The Liberal *Dundee Advertiser* criticised the lack of humanitarian and cosmopolitan spirit in Rosebery's address, with its suggestions that other nations 'somehow enjoy less of the guidance of the Divine finger'. The *Edinburgh Evening News* condemned Rosebery's 'jingoism' and shallow view of world history. On Sunday, 25 November, two Dundee clergymen preached sermons in critical response to Rose-

1 NLS, Rosebery MSS, MS 100057, fos 99–102, T. Wemyss Reid to Rosebery, 17 Nov. 1900; BL, Campbell-Bannerman MSS, Add. MS 41218, fos 20–3, E. Grey to Campbell-Bannerman, 17 Nov. 1900; *Scotsman*, 16, 17 Nov. 1900; Spender, *Campbell-Bannerman*, i, 305–8.

2 'Questions of Empire', in Lord Rosebery, *Miscellanies: Literary and Historical*, ed. J. Buchan, Lord Tweedsmuir (London, 1921), ii, 229–63.

3 Rhodes James, *Rosebery*, 419–20; *Scotsman*, 17, 20, 23, 24 Nov. 1900; Fry, *Patronage and Principle*, 120.

4 BL, Campbell-Bannerman MSS, Add. MS 41236, fos 29–35, A. L. Brown to Campbell-Bannerman, 21 Nov. 1900.



bery's 'gospel of imperialism'.<sup>1</sup> There was, in short, no united call for Rosebery's return from Liberals in Scotland.

In part this was because of growing public unease in Scotland with the new direction taken by the war in South Africa. For the war had not ended with the imperial victories in the early summer of 1900 as expected. Despite the occupation of their capitals, the Boers had continued to resist, living off the land and employing guerilla tactics against the superior numbers of imperial troops. In August 1900, the British command began a policy of burning Boer farms and placing Boer women and children in hastily constructed camps, where overcrowding and insanitary conditions would eventually result in the deaths of an estimated 4,000 women and 16,000 children.<sup>2</sup> The Scottish public, A. L. Brown informed Campbell-Bannerman in November 1900, was becoming deeply distressed by the way the war was being conducted—through 'devastation, burning houses, turning women and children adrift'. Gladstone, Brown averred, would have come down on such tactics 'like a cart of bricks'.<sup>3</sup>

On 14 June 1901, Campbell-Bannerman gave vent to the growing unease with the war in a speech before the National Reform Union in London. Morally indignant over a recent report on the high death rates and atrocious conditions in the camps—in February and March, a quarter of all children in the camps had died—Campbell-Bannerman denounced the government for employing 'methods of barbarism' in its conduct of the war in South Africa. Many were enraged by his remarks, which called into question the humanity of the imperial troops fighting in South Africa and seemed to encourage the Boer commandos. But Campbell-Bannerman was sincere in his moral outrage, and refused to retract his words. A few days later, on 17 June, he repeated the 'methods of barbarism' phrase in the house of commons, while supporting Lloyd George's motion to adjourn regular business and consider conditions in the camps. In the division that followed, the Liberal Imperialist MPs refused to vote with the party leader. Indeed, only 78 of the 186 Liberals in the house—including only 17 of the 34 Liberal MPs for Scotland—supported Campbell-Bannerman.<sup>4</sup> Haldane believed that the Liberal rank and file were at last convinced 'that Sir H. CB's leading is hopeless'.<sup>5</sup> Rosebery called for new direction for the divided party, but declined to come forward himself to claim the leadership. Asquith therefore

1 *Dundee Advertiser*, 17 Nov. 1900; *Edinburgh Evening News*, 17, 26 Nov. 1900.

2 Wilson, *CB*, 344.

3 BL, Campbell-Bannerman MSS, Add. MS 41236, fos 29–35, A. L. Brown to Campbell-Bannerman, 21 Nov. 1900.

4 *Scotsman*, 19 June 1901.

5 NLS, Haldane MSS, MS 5963, fos 225–6, R. B. Haldane to his mother, 22 June 1901.



assumed the leadership of the Liberal Imperialist section, which openly challenged Campbell-Bannerman and planned to appeal to Liberal opinion with a series of meetings to be held in Scotland during the autumn of 1901.

In Scotland, however, Liberal opinion was far from convinced that Campbell-Bannerman had been wrong to condemn the conditions in the camps. There was unease with a war being directed against women and children, and which increasingly seemed to have for its object the crushing of the Boer people.<sup>1</sup> The *Dundee Advertiser* also condemned Rosebery's public criticism of the party leader, when he himself declined to enter the political fray: 'the voice from a lonely height is apt to become thinner in its volume, as well as falser in its accent'.<sup>2</sup> For the pro-Boer *Edinburgh Evening News*, it was the Liberal Imperialists who had separated themselves from Liberal opinion by their unreserved support for the government. 'They could not', it observed of the Liberal Imperialists, 'help supporting annexation, they could not help supporting farm-burning, they cannot help supporting the horrors of the concentration camps. What claim have they, then, to remain with the Opposition, or to call themselves Liberal?'<sup>3</sup>

In the by-election in North-East Lanark, Campbell-Bannerman demonstrated that he would fight the Liberal Imperialists. In August 1901, the death of the Liberal MP, John Colville, forced a by-election in the industrial constituency of North-East Lanark, a solid Liberal seat since its creation in 1884. The Liberal constituency association selected as their candidate the wealthy Liberal Imperialist, Cecil Harmsworth, brother of the prominent newspaper proprietor, Alfred Harmsworth. Campbell-Bannerman, however, claimed that the Liberal Imperialists had used unfair influence with the local association and he refused to endorse Harmsworth's candidature.<sup>4</sup> Instead, he made it clear that he preferred the Labour candidate, Robert Smillie, president of the Scottish Miners' Federation. A pro-Boer and a home ruler, Smillie also professed himself to be 'an earnest advocate of all the reforms which at one time formed the various planks of the Liberal platform'.<sup>5</sup> The Scottish whip, John Sinclair, along with the Scottish Liberal MPs, D. V. Pirie and J. D. Hope, travelled to North-East Lanark to campaign for the Labour candidate. The result on 26 September was a split Liberal vote and the election of the Unionist

1 *Dundee Advertiser*, 15, 18, 19 June 1901; *Edinburgh Evening News*, 15, 18 June 1901.

2 *Dundee Advertiser*, 18 Jul. 1901.

3 *Edinburgh Evening News*, 18 June 1901.

4 BL, Viscount Gladstone MSS, Add. MS 45995, fos 16-7, J. Sinclair to H. Gladstone, 28 Aug. [1901]; *Scotsman*, 5, 6 Sep. 1901.

5 *Scotsman*, 4 Sep. 1901; W. H. Fraser, 'The Labour Party in Scotland', in *The First Labour Party, 1906-1914*, ed. K. D. Brown (London, 1985), 42-3.

candidate.<sup>1</sup> The Liberal Imperialists protested against the conduct of 'certain Liberal MPs' in the North-East Lanark contest to the executive council of the Scottish Liberal Association—but they no longer controlled the executive and no action was taken.<sup>2</sup>

In late September, the Liberal Imperialists began their autumn campaign, with Asquith, Haldane, Grey and Munro-Ferguson addressing meetings in different parts of Scotland, calling for the abandonment of Irish home rule and reaffirming their commitment to imperialism and national efficiency.<sup>3</sup> 'It is mutiny and enmity now', Campbell-Bannerman observed to Sinclair on 21 September, 'just as much as before'.<sup>4</sup> The Asquith campaign, however, failed to arouse much enthusiasm and drew to a quiet close in late October. On 25 October, Campbell-Bannerman addressed the autumn conference of the Scottish Liberal Association in Stirling, reaffirming that he would neither resign as leader nor cease to condemn 'methods of barbarism' in South Africa. The conference responded to his pluck by reaffirming its 'strenuous and unreserved support' for his leadership, and unanimously adopting an executive-sponsored resolution deploring the government's South African policy for threatening 'to involve the Country and Empire in humiliation and disaster'.<sup>5</sup>

The public mood in Scotland was changing. As the war dragged on, with its drain on lives and money, Liberal Imperialist speeches on the mission of empire grew less alluring. Behind the sermons on Britain's imperial destiny, there seemed to lurk something dark and disturbing. On 30 October, an anti-war meeting was held in Edinburgh's Music Hall, with Lloyd George as principal speaker. The hall was filled to overflowing and there were no disturbances. 'Scotsmen', commented the *Edinburgh Evening News* the next day, 'are recovering from their temporary hallucination, and are once more ready to respond to the old, well-tried watchwords of freedom and justice'.<sup>6</sup> Campbell-Bannerman was now receiving additional support from a group of zealous young Liberal pro-Boers who a year before had formed the Young Scots Society. With the motto, 'For Scotland and Gladstone', the Young Scots campaigned for an end to the war and the rejection of imperialism. Young Scots had organised a massive anti-war meeting in Edinburgh's Waverley Market in April 1901, which had attracted an estimated 10,000. They were present in force

1 Mathew, *Liberal Imperialists*, 74–5; R. Smillie, *My Life for Labour* (London, 1924), 107–12; *Scotsman*, 20, 21, 24, 26, 27, 28 Sep. 1901; D. Howell, *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party* (Manchester, 1983), 163–6.

2 EUL, SLA Mins., Executive Council, 16 Oct. 1901.

3 *Scotsman*, 30 Sep., 4, 5, 22, 23, 25 Oct. 1901.

4 Pentland, *Lord Pentland*, 62; Spender, *Campbell-Bannerman*, ii, 5–6.

5 EUL, SLA Mins., 25 Oct. 1901; *Scotsman*, 26 Oct. 1901.

6 *Edinburgh Evening News*, 1 Nov. 1901.

to heckle the Asquith committee meetings in September and October and they offered their services to the Scottish Liberal Association to organise anti-war meetings.<sup>1</sup> 'I am glad to report to you well of the general feeling in Scotland', Campbell-Bannerman wrote to Lord Ripon early in November:

It is a great change since last year, and last week nothing could have exceeded the friendly enthusiasm with which I was received, or the sympathy expressed even for extreme views of the war. The revolt of our "Lib. Imps."—the *Chartered Company* as I call them has failed: the Asquith demonstration squib fizzed off the wrong way, and, for the present, things go well.<sup>2</sup>

Two years before, Rosebery had prophesied that the war and its imperialist enthusiasms would serve to purge the Liberal party of its 'ranker elements' and reconstruct it around the principles of imperialism and national efficiency. But now, with the failure of their autumn campaign to overthrow Campbell-Bannerman, it was the Liberal Imperialists who were in danger of being driven from the party. As Haldane observed to Rosebery on 6 November, 'we have burned our boats'.<sup>3</sup> Throughout October, Rosebery had remained in seclusion on his Dalmeny estate outside Edinburgh, plagued by indecision and insomnia as the Liberal Imperialist 'revolt' in Scotland collapsed. Would it be honourable for him to stand by and watch as his supporters were driven into the wilderness?

## V

Rosebery came to the defence of his followers on 16 December with a well-publicised address at Chesterfield, in which he described a way forward to Liberal reunion and recovery. He summoned the Liberal party to discard 'the fly-blown phylacteries of obsolete policies', including Irish home rule and Gladstonian reserve toward the empire, and to begin again with a 'clean slate' from which they might develop policies for the increased efficiency of the state. He also called for immediate negotiations to end the war in South Africa. There should be, he maintained, the offer of a generous amnesty for Boer commandos still in the field and government grants for restoring destroyed farms and livestock.<sup>4</sup> Following the Chesterfield address, Rosebery and Campbell-Bannerman met together privately in Lon-

<sup>1</sup> *Scotsman*, 27 Apr. 1901; Lord Craigmyle, *Letters to Isabel* (London, 1936), 205–10; EUL, SLA Mins., Organising Committee, Edinburgh, 7 Nov. 1901.

<sup>2</sup> Cited in L. Wolf, *Life of the First Marquess of Ripon* (London, 1921), ii, 265–6.

<sup>3</sup> Mathew, *Liberal Imperialists*, 75–8.

<sup>4</sup> *Scotsman*, 17 Dec. 1910.

don in an attempt to heal the rift in the Liberal party. The discussion broke down, however—in part over the fate of Rosebery's Liberal Imperialist followers. 'He spoke', Rosebery noted the next day in a personal memorandum, '... with great bitterness (quite unlike him) of the "rebellion" attempted in Scotland which had been "put down and squashed out by our fellows"'. He named Haldane and Munro-Ferguson with peculiar asperity'.<sup>1</sup> Relations between the two men deteriorated still further when a report of their private interview appeared in the *Liberal Dundee Advertiser*—the result, Rosebery believed, of a deliberate leak by Campbell-Bannerman. On 25 December, Sinclair reported from Scotland that the Liberal Imperialists continued to hold 'aloof from the general party meetings and functions' and to associate exclusively among themselves.<sup>2</sup>

Haldane was in fact now engaged in organisational work in Scotland. Following discussions with Rosebery at Dalmeny, Haldane travelled to Glasgow, where he took soundings on the depth of imperialist and anti-Irish feeling. Early in January, he reported to Rosebery that there was enthusiasm in Glasgow for the idea of a new Liberal Imperialist organisation, and by 9 January, he had formed an organising committee for a proposed 'Scottish National Liberal Association'.<sup>3</sup> Not connected with the largely discredited Liberal Imperialist League founded in England in April 1900, this new organisation emphasized the principles of national efficiency as outlined in Rosebery's Chesterfield address.<sup>4</sup> Encouraged by Haldane's success in Glasgow, Rosebery gave the go ahead for a new national association, the Liberal League, which was inaugurated in London on 26 February 1902. The Glasgow organisation immediately affiliated, taking the new title of 'The Glasgow and West of Scotland Liberal League'. Addressing the Glasgow branch on 10 March, Rosebery stated that the league's aim was not to split the Liberal party, but rather to enable Liberal Imperialists to work for reform from within the party without fear of the official leadership.<sup>5</sup>

The Liberal League devoted its organisational efforts largely to Scotland, which was still regarded as Rosebery's political base and where they hoped to appeal to Liberal businessmen, landowners and professionals with the message of 'efficiency'. Despite the early hopes, however, it proved difficult to sustain public interest in the league.

1 Marquess of Crewe, *Lord Rosebery* (London, 1931), ii, 573–4.

2 BL, Viscount Gladstone MSS, Add. MS 45986, fos 47–8, Rosebery to H. Gladstone, 10 Jan. 1902; Add. MS 45995, fos 34–9, J. Sinclair to Gladstone, 25 Dec. 1901.

3 NLS, Rosebery MSS, MS 10030, fos 1–5, R. B. Haldane to Rosebery, 3, 9 Jan. 1902.

4 Mathew, *Liberal Imperialists*, 62.

5 *Ibid.*, 86–90; Hamer, *Liberal Politics*, 276–8; C. Douglas, 'The Liberal League', *Contemporary Review*, lxxxi (Apr. 1902), 573–88.

Organisational efforts were hampered by suspicions that Rosebery would lose interest and return to retirement. 'The two or three men to whom I spoke in Edinburgh', Munro-Ferguson informed Rosebery on 19 June, 'all said much the same thing—"Are we going to be left in the lurch?"'<sup>1</sup> Further, in May 1902 the war in South Africa finally came to an end. With the war over, many wished to put its divisions behind them. 'The danger now', the wealthy Glasgow shipowner and league member, Joseph Maclay, informed Rosebery on 19 June, 'is apathy. . . . Many think [the league] has served the purpose of its existence and unity should now be the aim'. In Edinburgh, Gibson-Carmichael found little eagerness for proposals to open a second Scottish league branch there. 'Now that the war is over', he wrote to Rosebery on 3 July, 'to start new branches of it will only be interpreted as acting factiously and that will not be at all popular in Scotland'. At Rosebery's insistence, a league branch was established in Edinburgh in late July 1902. Throughout the summer and autumn, Rosebery and other league leaders concentrated their speaking and organisational efforts on Scotland.<sup>2</sup> Campbell-Bannerman, however, was no longer worried. Given that 'the League leaders are all there', he reassured Sinclair on 9 October, it was not surprising that they were again 'doing much devilment' north of the Tweed. But he was confident the league would fail.<sup>3</sup> By late 1902, the league was indeed stagnating in Scotland and its financial contributions were drying up. 'Scotland does not give us a shilling', Rosebery complained to Haldane on 5 September 1902, 'indeed it extracts what it can from our meagre funds'.<sup>4</sup>

The failure of the Liberal League reflected declining Scottish confidence in the Roseberyites and their imperial vision. There was growing concern over the costs of the war, while peace brought a drying up of lucrative war-time contracts. The Liberal party in Scotland was rallying under the leadership of Campbell-Bannerman, but it was rallying to the old orthodoxy of peace, retrenchment and democratic reform, and not to efficiency and imperialism. While the league was stagnating by the autumn of 1902, it was the issue of tariff reform that finally finished the league as a political force and provided the opportunity for Liberal reunion and revival. After May 1903, when the Unionist colonial secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, revived the issue of protective tariffs and imperial preference, Scottish

1 NLS, Rosebery MSS, MS 10019, fos 146–7, R. Munro-Ferguson to Rosebery, 19 June 1902.

2 *Ibid.* MS 10168, fos 154–5, J. Maclay to Rosebery, 19 June 1902, fos 178–83, T. D. Gibson-Carmichael to Rosebery, 3 Jul. 1902; Hutchison, *Political History of Scotland*, 228–9.

3 BL, Campbell-Bannerman MSS, Add. MS 41230, fos 58–9, Campbell-Bannerman to Sinclair, 9 Oct. 1902.

4 Hutchison, *Political History of Scotland*, 228.

Liberal opinion rallied in defence of free trade. Even in Unionist Glasgow, the shipbuilding, coal and steel interests rejected protection as a threat to their economic interests. Privately Rosebery, Haldane and other league leaders were prepared to consider proposals for imperial preference. However, in view of the popular wave against protection and their own distrust of Chamberlain, the league decided to support fully the movement for free trade. In Scotland, the league joined with the Scottish Liberal Association and Young Scots Society to form the Scottish Free Trade Union. By 1904, the league was cooperating in electoral organisation with the Scottish Liberal Association, and league leaders, including Munro-Ferguson and Thomas Glen-Coats, rejoined the Scottish Liberal Association executive.

The Scottish Liberal party entered the election of January 1906 with unity among its three main Liberal organisations—the Scottish Liberal Association in the centre, the Liberal League on the right and the Young Scots Society on the left.<sup>1</sup> At the election, the Liberals won 58 of Scotland's 72 seats—the largest Liberal victory in Scotland since 1885. The triumph was repeated four years later. In the election of January 1910, when the Liberal party lost over 100 seats in England, the Liberals in Scotland actually added another seat, giving them now 59 seats to Labour's 2 and the Unionists' 11. 'The election', observed *Blackwood's Magazine* in March 1910, 'being largely fought on old issues, resurrected much of the old Liberalism of the 'eighties. . . . the spirit of Mr. Gladstone still walks on Scottish soil, and the echoes of Midlothian have not died away'.<sup>2</sup> The election in December 1910 brought virtually no change. Never before had the Liberals done so well in Scotland while doing so poorly in England.<sup>3</sup>

Rosebery's political career was now largely over. The Liberal League in Scotland dissolved in 1906 (a few years before it broke up in England), and most of Rosebery's followers made their peace with Campbell-Bannerman and entered the Liberal government in 1905. But for Rosebery there had been no second Midlothian—no clear call from the Scottish people, no triumphant return as leader to purge the party of the 'ranker elements' and reconstruct it on Liberal Imperialist principles. At the beginning of the South African war, the Roseberyites' campaign to win Scotland over to Liberal Imperialism had had a reasonable prospect of success. Rosebery was extremely popular in Scotland, while most Scottish Liberals probably supported the war for imperial interests in South Africa. But after

1 EUL, SLA Mins., Organising Committee, 5 Nov., 21 Dec. 1905, 7 Feb. 1906.

2 'The Elections and their Moral', *Blackwood's Magazine*, clxxxvii (Mar. 1910), 455.

3 N. Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People: The British General Elections of 1910* (London, 1972), 381–5, 400–2.



the autumn of 1900, with the spiralling cost of the war and the moral unease over farm-burning and the camps, Scottish Liberals—including apparently the business, landowning and professional groups to whom Liberal Imperialists had directed their main appeal—began to realise that there was a limit to the price they were willing to pay for empire. Had the British forces achieved an early victory in the South African war at a modest cost, Rosebery's support for the war might have brought Liberal Imperialism the popular impetus that it needed. But the expense and moral ambiguities of the latter stages of war served to discredit Rosebery's imperial vision. Writing in mid-1903, Hector Macpherson, editor of the *Edinburgh Evening News*, argued that Rosebery's attempt at the beginning of the war to convert Scottish Liberalism to imperialism had been understandable. 'What was not intelligible', Macpherson continued, 'was his belief that after the full effect of the war had become manifest Scottish Liberals would endorse a policy which involved increased national expenditure'.<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of the war, John Morley had argued that Britain could not afford both an expansionist imperial policy and needed social reforms at home. The South African war had demonstrated the immense financial costs of modern warfare, while it was not clear that controlling and developing the South African region would bring appreciable benefits to the Scottish economy.

If anyone had revived the echoes of Midlothian, it had been Campbell-Bannerman—reviving with his condemnations of the 'methods of barbarism' some of Gladstone's prophetic rage against the arrogance of power that had thrilled Scotland in the later 1870s. The Liberal Imperialist vision had called for the subordination of Scottish national identity to the mission of the British imperial state, and the subordination of popular government to the guidance of a wealthy educated elite. During the South African war, rank and file Scottish Liberals largely rejected this idea of subordination and revived a Scottish radical identity. The benefits of empire no longer seemed worth the sacrifice, and the elite no longer commanded such confidence. After 1902, the Young Scots Society revived the campaign for Scottish home rule, and the Liberal party in Scotland renewed its commitment to home-rule-all-round.<sup>2</sup> The economic crisis of 1908 strengthened the influence of English social reformers in the Liberal party in Scotland, while the Liberal victories in 1910, as I. G. C. Hutchison has noted, 'positively opened the floodgates to

<sup>1</sup> H. Macpherson, 'Scottish Liberalism: Past and Present', *The Speaker*, n.s., viii (6 June 1903), 230.

<sup>2</sup> Hutchison, *Political History of Scotland*, 241; J. Brand, *The National Movement in Scotland* (London, 1978), 40–1.



social radicals'.<sup>1</sup> The Liberal party in Scotland directed its attention to reform at home—not in order to succour an imperial race (as the Liberal Imperialists would have had it) but to improve conditions for the Scottish people and give greater voice to popular aspirations on the 'Celtic fringe' of the British Isles.

1 Hutchison, *Political History of Scotland*, 239–40.